

Commissioner's Weekly Wrap Up

DCS Communications Office

June 25, 2004

This Week In Central Office

Wednesday, June 23

Commissioner Miller held a central office "regional training" at the Cordell Hull building in Nashville.

Friday, June 25

Commissioner Miller and Executive Director for Juvenile Justice Programs Ken Steverson attend the Mountain View Youth Development Center 2004 Graduation Ceremony in Jefferson Co. Miller then traveled to the West View Center in Knoxville for a facility tour and visit.

The Week Ahead

Monday, June 28

Commissioner Miller will conduct supervisory training for the Mid-Cumberland, South East and Davidson Co. regions. The training will be held at TPS in Nashville. Special thanks to the Woodland Hills staff for providing food for Monday's event!

Staff Contact: Carla.aaron@state.tn.us

Wednesday, June 30

Commissioner Miller will give closing remarks at the Biennial Child Welfare Conference in Washington D.C.

LAST CALL! Please Submit Your Ideas for the Summer Trim Down

Do you crave more time to do good quality work and wish to be rid of the hassles of unnecessary procedures and paperwork? Do you believe there are areas within our agency that we could "trim down" the process? If you answered yes, then put on your thinking cap. We need your help!

Senior management needs your assistance in identifying forms, policies, and procedures that you believe do not add any value to your work, and could possibly be abolished. Everything is open for consideration; however, items that are mandated by a federal statute, a state statute or a consent decree obviously cannot be included in this effort.



Email your suggestions to DCS.Challenge@state.tn.us and please be as specific as possible in referencing the policy or procedure you wish to be considered in this "trim down". Submit your ideas and suggestions as soon as possible, however they need to be received by the **close of business on June 30th.**

From the Desk of Viola Miller: Well Being – Our Next Great Frontier

For many years the work of public child welfare was safety. Orphanages abounded and were seen as the best alternative for children whose homes were non-existent or were unable to keep children safe.

As awareness grew that children deserved and needed homes and families, permanency issues came onto our radar screens. Safety was no longer enough. As a profession, we came to embrace the concept that all children deserve a home with loving adults. The 1995 Adoption and Safe Families Act firmly established in law the responsibility of public child welfare to provide more than just safety. We were asked to live the dream of every child having a “forever” family.

As our access to outcomes data began to improve and be mandated by the Child and Families Services Review, our awareness of the critical issues of well-being came into focus. **Safety isn’t enough. Permanency isn’t enough. If every child deserves the opportunity to grow and develop to a healthy, fulfilling adulthood, we must address education, physical and behavioral health and each child’s transition to adulthood.**

These issues are probably our most challenging because we cannot do them alone. Our silo had to come down. No longer could we work in isolation. Our only hope of meeting the needs of our children was to form partnerships for

wellness...partnerships with schools, mental and physical health providers, churches, community service agencies and a myriad of others who shared our vision of well being for the children and families we serve. Our unified response to the issues of safety, permanency and well-being are best reflected in our new practice model. We are embracing the concept of Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) as our primary methodology for comprehensively addressing issues and for making decisions about our children and families.

The model says:

- ◆ We cannot do this work alone;
- ◆ We must tear down all our barriers and ask communities and families to come together to solve problems that limit our children’s success;
- ◆ We must engage family strengths;
- ◆ We must support families and help them build natural community based networks that can help children flourish and grow; be well educated and healthy.

One of our greatest challenges in this new world of inclusiveness and transparency is the ability to address the needs of our older youth. Once again, I ask that we come clean...that we admit in the sunlight that our outcomes for youth who “age out” of care are grievous at best.

-MORE-

Far too many of our kids at age eighteen are essentially “on the street” with no home, no responsible adult in their lives and no prospects for a brighter future.

We must do better. Tennessee’s youth deserve more than we are giving them.

Few eighteen year olds are prepared for total independence. My children are 26 and 36 and they still need Mom when the going gets tough.

Our current independent living services are much too circumscribed and static. They must become flexible and individualized. Most importantly they must engage every youth in care aged 14 and older. I’m not even convinced that 14 is young enough.

Did you know that many children who go to Ivy League schools make that that decision with their families when the child is in the fourth grade? Goals, dreams and aspirations are set early in a child’s life.

I worry about our children’s dreams. Do they see a bright future? Do they hope for an education or the ability to have a home, take vacations, marry, have children of their own or buy a car? For many of them, I’m afraid that their dreams are of no more than survival: have enough to eat...shoes to wear...a warm place to sleep.

We must do better if we are committing ourselves to safety, permanency and well being - That well being part is our next great challenge. If we remove children from their homes, with all the damage inherent in that act, we then take on the obligation of their well-being. We must see that they are healthy, educated and have an opportunity for a fulfilling satisfying adulthood.

The challenges are enormous and they force us to step out of our comfort zone. How will we respond?

Let me know what you think. I know that many of you have been reading this series of essays. This one is my tenth. I only promised ten, but I somehow don’t feel finished.

Are there other issues you would like for me, or someone else at Central Office, to address? **Have these been helpful or a waste of time?** I haven’t received much feedback on this method of communication so I really don’t know. **Let me hear from you. Express your opinions and ideas.** Would some of you like to write an essay for the Weekly Wrap-Up?

Unless I hear from you, this is my final installment. It’s been fun.

THE END



Extra Extra!

Check out the [DCS Newsroom](#) to view this month's collection of press releases.

Who Says Permanency Training Can't Be Fun?

We would like to spotlight Warren County's own **Donna Denny** for her enthusiasm and creativity!



Donna showed off her talents in a song entitled, *The PPU Rap*, which she wrote at the Permanency Program Training held in Cookeville on June 8, 9, and 10.



The PPU Rap

These are the things
We need to know –
Things you done and where
You wanna go
You gotta nice home and gotta good job
Gotta lotta help from Aunt Jane and Uncle Bob

You don't do drugs and you don't drink
Before you act out – you so stop and think
The car may be broken in the front yard
But you go to work every day and come home tired.

You do these things together and you gotta lot a love
When things get bad – you CAN rise above
It's all up to you but we are there to aid
We'll stand behind you so you won't be afraid.

**Written by Donna Denny, HCCM
Permanency Plan University
Warren County Juvenile Justice**



LOOK FOR THE POSITIVES - By Gene Simmons

Our lives are overflowing with negative information from the newspapers, magazines, television and radio. Nations are at war, thousands are dying of starvation and hundreds are killed by natural disasters. There is no avoiding or ignoring the facts. We even receive negativity from our own families and friends every single day.

How we deal with this information is up to us. One, we can absorb it all and allow it to negatively dominate our thoughts, emotions, attitudes and our day-to-day lives. Or two, we can view these events as an unfortunately "normal" part of our existence and concentrate on those things we can do something about - such as our own personal lives and how we can positively affect and influence ourselves and those around us. In fact, if we dwell on the negatives around us and constantly reinforce them with our thoughts and words, our lives will tend to be mostly negative. "Bad" things are more likely to keep happening to us.

Negatives fill our emotional bucket quickly and before we know it, they are spilling all over ourselves and those around us. Isn't it far more logical to fill our bucket with positives? The people around us are sure to be much more receptive to any spillage that might occur.

If we change our focus instead, to the good things of life - the positives - there is an above average chance that things will get much better. Try this. Make a "Gratitude Check". Take some time for yourself and write down the good things in your life or the things you enjoy and appreciate. Start with the fact that you woke up this morning, then go from there. No matter how bad your situation is, if you try just a little you'll have several hundred items on your list. A helpful hint - keep the list handy and add to it as you think of other things. There will always be days when your list will come in handy to give you a pick-me-up.

Be selective about what you read, watch on TV and the music you listen to. Think about the information your mind is absorbing and determine whether it's really good for you. Be selective with your friends and pay attention to the conversations you are having. Is the relationship -or the conversation - based on negative words and feelings? Would you be better off changing the subject - or finding someone different to spend your time with?

Watch your "self talk". This is the imaginary conversations we have with ourselves and others, especially when there are potential conflicts on the horizon. Stop "badmouthin'" the people in your life and stop badmouthin' yourself! Every time we do that, we are reinforcing to ourselves just how miserable the world is and how unfortunate we are.

Look for the positives in everything that happens in your life, no matter how bad they seem at the time. Life is filled with lessons and the potential for each of us to learn, especially from the uncomfortable situations. Pay attention. Learn as quickly as possible so these lessons need not be repeated.
